

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

Please amend Claims 4, 6, 19 and 24. Please cancel Claims 1-3, 5, 17, 18, 20-23, 24, 38, 39.

Following entry of the amendments in this Amendment, the pending claims in the present application read as follows:

1 Claims 1-3. (Canceled)

1 4. (Currently Amended) A progressive flex headplate assembly
2 ~~according to Claim 2,~~ for use in the construction of a saddle tree capable of
3 fitting horses of different widths, said progressive flex headplate
4 comprising:
5 an elongated spring element having a first end portion, a second end
6 portion, and a center portion located therebetween, said elongated spring
7 element having a larger thickness dimension at said center portion than at
8 said first and second end portions, a top segment, a middle segment, and a
9 bottom segment constructed of a flexible, resilient material, wherein said
10 top segment has a first length dimension, said middle segment has a
11 intermediate length dimension longer than said first length dimension of
12 said top segment, and said bottom segment has a length dimension greater
13 than said intermediate length dimension of said middle segment;
14 wherein said segments are consecutively arranged to overlay each
15 other from said top segment to said bottom segment; and
16 a curved segment constructed of a rigid material, said curved
17 segment secured to said center portion of said elongated spring element;

18 wherein said first and said second end portions of said elongated
19 spring element exhibit both progressive flexibility and resilience in
20 response to flexure of said first and second end portions permitting the
21 headplate assembly to flex to fit more than one size horse;

22 wherein each of said top segment, said middle segment, and said
23 bottom segment has a front edge and a back edge, and wherein one of said
24 top segment, said middle segment, and said bottom segment includes two
25 rail segments extending outwardly from said back edge thereof.

1 5. (Canceled)

1 6. (Currently Amended) A saddle tree for use in the construction of a
2 progressive flex riding saddle for a horse, said saddle tree comprising:
3 ~~the a~~ progressive flex headplate of Claim 1, comprising an elongated spring
4 element having a first end portion, a second end portion, and a center
5 portion located therebetween, said elongated spring element having a
6 larger thickness dimension at said center portion than at said first and
7 second end portions; and

8 a curved segment constructed of a rigid material, said curved
9 segment secured to said center portion of said elongated spring element;

10 wherein said first and said second end portions of said elongated
11 spring element exhibit both progressive flexibility and resilience in
12 response to flexure of said first and second end portions permitting the
13 headplate assembly to flex to fit more than one size horse, which will be
14 located at a position near the front of the horse when the saddle is installed
15 thereupon;

16 a cantle portion which will be located at a position near the rear of
17 the horse when the saddle is installed thereupon; and

18 a flexible connecting portion connecting the progressive flex headplate
19 assembly to said cantle portion.

1 7. (Previously Presented) A headplate assembly for use in the
2 construction of a progressive flex saddle tree, said headplate assembly
3 comprising:
4 a plurality of flexible, resilient segments positioned overlapping
5 each other, said flexible segments forming a stack having a top side and a
6 bottom side, said stack also having first and second legs and a central
7 portion therebetween; and
8 a rigid, curved segment aligned with and secured to one of said top
9 side and said bottom side of said stack at said central portion thereof;
10 wherein said first leg will be positioned on one side of a horse's withers
11 and said second leg will be positioned on the other side of the horse's
12 withers when the headplate assembly is installed thereupon, and wherein
13 each of said legs exhibit both progressive flexibility and resilience in
14 response to flexure of said legs, thereby permitting said legs to
15 accommodate horses having different sized withers.

1 8. (Original) A headplate assembly according to Claim 7, wherein said
2 plurality of flexible, resilient segments includes from about two to about
3 five flexible, resilient segments.

1 9. (Original) A headplate assembly according to Claim 7, wherein
2 each of said plurality of flexible, resilient segments is constructed from
3 nylon, vinyl, polyethylene, polystyrene, polypropylene, polyvinyl chloride,
4 or a combination thereof.

1 10. (Original) A headplate assembly according to Claim 7, wherein
2 each of said plurality of flexible, resilient segments is constructed from of
3 a metal or an alloy material.

1 11. (Original) A headplate assembly according to Claim 7, wherein
2 each of said flexible, resilient segments includes a front edge and a back
3 edge and wherein each of said flexible, resilient segments has a small,
4 curved indentation formed in said front edge thereof.

1 12. (Original) A headplate assembly according to Claim 11, wherein
2 one of said flexible, resilient segments includes two connecting rails
3 extending outwardly from said back edge thereof.

1 13. (Original) A headplate assembly according to Claim 7, wherein said
2 rigid, curved segment is secured to said stack using a securing mechanism.

1 14. (Original) A headplate assembly according to Claim 13, wherein
2 said securing mechanism comprises a plurality of rivets and washers.

1 15. (Original) A headplate assembly according to Claim 13, wherein
2 said securing mechanism is selected from the group consisting of tacks,
3 nails, screws, bolts, pins, and a combination thereof.

1 16. (Original) A progressive flex saddle tree comprising:
2 the headplate assembly of Claim 7;
3 a cantle portion located at a position which is spaced away from
4 said headplate assembly; and
5 a flexible connecting portion connecting said progressive flex headplate to
6 said cantle portion.

1 Claims 17 and 18. (Canceled)

1 19. (Currently Amended) A headplate assembly ~~according to Claim 17~~
2 providing a progressive flex to a saddle tree, said headplate assembly
3 comprising:

4 a top segment, a middle segment, and a bottom segment each
5 constructed of a resilient, flexible material, each of said top segment, said
6 middle segment, and said bottom segment having a length dimension and a
7 midpoint portion located at substantially the midpoint of said length
8 dimension, said length dimension of said bottom segment being longer than
9 said length dimension of said middle segment and said length dimension of
10 said middle segment being longer than said length dimension of said top
11 segment, each of said top segment, said middle segment and said bottom
12 segment has having a front edge and a back edge;

13 wherein said top segment, said middle segment, and said bottom
14 segment are consecutively arranged overlapping each other from said top
15 segment to said bottom segment with said midpoint portions of each of said
16 top segment, said middle segment, and said bottom segment being aligned and
17 wherein one of said top segment, said middle segment and said bottom
18 segment further comprises at least one connecting rail extending from said
19 back edge thereof;

20 a rigid, curved segment overlaying and secured to one of said top
21 segment or said bottom segment at said midpoint portion thereof to thereby
22 form a substantially V-shaped assembly;

23 wherein said substantially V-shaped assembly has a fixed apex portion,
24 a first leg intended to lie on one side of a horse's withers, and a second leg
25 intended to lie on the other side of a horse's withers, each of said legs being

26 progressively flexible and exhibiting progressive resistance in response to
27 flexure of each of said legs.

1 20-23. (Canceled)

1 24. (Original) A progressive flex saddle tree for use in a riding saddle for a
2 horse, said progressive flex saddle tree comprising:

3 ~~the~~ a headplate assembly of Claim 17, which will be located at a
4 position near a front portion of the horse comprising: ÷

5 a top segment, a middle segment, and a bottom segment each
6 constructed of a resilient, flexible material, each of said top segment,
7 said middle segment, and said bottom segment having a length
8 dimension and a midpoint portion located at substantially the midpoint
9 of said length dimension, said length dimension of said bottom segment
10 being longer than said length dimension of said middle segment and
11 said length dimension of said middle segment being longer than said
12 length dimension of said top segment;

13 wherein said top segment, said middle segment, and said bottom
14 segment are consecutively arranged overlapping each other from said
15 top segment to said bottom segment with said midpoint portions of
16 each of said top segment, said middle segment, and said bottom
17 segment being aligned; and

18 a rigid, curved segment overlaying and secured to one of said
19 top segment or said bottom segment at said midpoint portion thereof to
20 thereby form a substantially V-shaped assembly;

21 wherein said substantially V-shaped assembly has a fixed apex
22 portion, a first leg intended to lie on one side of a horse's withers, and a

23 second leg intended to lie on the other side of a horse's withers, each of
24 said legs being progressively flexible and exhibiting progressive
25 resistance in response to flexure of each of said legs;
26 a cantle portion which will be located at a position near the rear of the
27 horse; and
28 a flexible connecting portion connecting said progressive flex headplate
29 and said cantle portion.

1 25. (Original) A progressive flex saddle used to accommodate horses of
2 differing sizes, said progressive flex saddle comprising:
3 the progressive flex saddle tree of Claim 24.

1 26. (Previously Presented) A progressive flex saddle tree for use in a riding
2 saddle for a horse, said progressive flex saddle tree comprising:
3 a progressive flex headplate assembly including:
4 a plurality of flexible, resilient segments positioned overlapping
5 each other, said flexible segments forming a stack having a top side, a
6 bottom side, first and second legs and a midpoint portion located
7 between said first and second legs; and
8 a rigid, curved segment aligned with and secured to one of said
9 top side and said bottom side of said stack at said midpoint portion
10 thereof;
11 a cantle portion having an inverted U-shape; and
12 a flexible connecting portion joining said progressive flex headplate
13 assembly and said cantle portion;
14 wherein said first leg will be positioned on one side of a horse's withers
15 and said second leg will be positioned on the other side of the horse's withers

16 when the riding saddle including the saddle tree is installed thereupon,
17 wherein each of said first and second legs exhibit both progressive flexibility
18 and progressive resilience in response to flexure thereof, permitting said
19 saddle tree to accommodate horses having different sized withers.

1 27. (Original) A progressive flex saddle tree according to Claim 26,
2 wherein said plurality of flexible, resilient segments are constructed from
3 nylon, vinyl, polyethylene, polystyrene, polypropylene, polyvinyl chloride, or
4 a combination thereof.

1 28. (Original) A progressive flex saddle tree according to Claim 26,
2 wherein said headplate comprises from two to five flexible, resilient segments.

1 29. (Original) A progressive flex saddle tree according to Claim 26,
2 wherein said rigid, curved segment is constructed of a metal, a wood, or a
3 thermoplastic material.

1 30. (Original) A progressive flex saddle tree according to Claim 26, further
2 comprising:

3 at least one connecting rail formed integrally with one of said flexible,
4 resilient segments and extending outwardly from said one of said flexible,
5 resilient segments and engaging said cantle portion.

1 31. (Original) A progressive flex riding saddle comprising:
2 the progressive flex saddle tree of Claim 26, said progressive flex
3 saddle tree having a top portion and a bottom portion;
4 a seat cover for covering said top portion of said saddle tree; and
5 a lower saddle assembly for supporting said saddle tree, said lower
6 portion comprising first and second elongated members that will lie on either

side of a horse's spine, and at least two saddle panels affixed to said elongated members;

wherein said progressive flex saddle tree is secured at said bottom portion to said lower saddle assembly.

32. (Original) A saddle tree for use in a riding saddle capable of fitting more than one size horse, said saddle tree comprising:

a top segment, a middle segment, and a bottom segment each constructed of a resilient, flexible material, each of said top segment, said middle segment, and said bottom segment having a length dimension and a midpoint portion located at substantially the midpoint of said length dimension, said length dimension of said bottom segment being longer than said length dimension of said middle segment and said length dimension of said middle segment being longer than said length dimension of said top segment;

wherein said top, middle and bottom segments are consecutively arranged overlapping each other from said top segment to said bottom segment with each of said midpoint portions being aligned; and

a rigid, curved segment overlaying and affixed to one of said top segment and said bottom segment at said midpoint portion thereof; wherein said segments and said rigid curved segment form a substantially V-shaped headplate assembly having a fixed apex portion and a first leg intended to lie on one side of a horse's withers, and a second leg intended to lie on another side of the horse's withers, each of said first and second legs being progressively flexible and also exhibiting resilience in response to flexure of said first and second legs;

22 a cantle portion having an inverted U-shape, said cantle portion having
23 a top side projecting upwardly to form a seat back for a saddle, said cantle
24 having a substantially flat bottom side; and
25 a connecting portion joining said substantially V-shaped headplate assembly
26 and said cantle portion.

1 33. (Original) A progressive flex saddle tree according to Claim 32,
2 wherein said top segment, said middle segment, and said bottom segment are
3 each constructed from nylon, vinyl, polyethylene, polystyrene, polypropylene,
4 polyvinyl chloride, or a combination thereof.

1 34. (Original) A progressive flex saddle tree according to Claim 32,
2 wherein said rigid curved segment is constructed of a rigid material selected
3 from metal, plastic, wood, or combinations thereof.

1 35. (Original) A progressive flex saddle tree according to Claim 32,
2 wherein said connecting portion is substantially flat and is constructed of a
3 flexible material selected from leather, nylon, woven fabric, or nonwoven
4 fabric.

1 36. (Original) A saddle tree according to Claim 32, further comprising:
2 at least one connecting rail extending outwardly from one of said top
3 segment, said middle segment, and said bottom segment at a position adjacent
4 said midpoint portion thereof;
5 wherein said connecting rail joins said headplate assembly to said
6 cantle portion.

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1 37. (Original) A riding saddle capable of fitting more than one horse, said riding
2 saddle comprising a progressive flex saddle tree, said saddle tree comprising:
3 a headplate assembly which will be located at the front of the horse when the
4 riding saddle is installed thereupon, said headplate assembly including an elongated
5 spring element having a first end portion, a second end portion, and a center portion
6 located therebetween, said elongated spring element having a larger thickness dimension
7 at said center portion than at said first and second end portions, and a curved segment
8 constructed of a rigid material, said curved segment secured to said center portion of said
9 elongated spring element;
10 wherein said first and said second end portions of said elongated spring element
11 exhibit both progressive flexibility and progressive resilience in response to flexure of
12 said first and second end portions, thereby permitting the headplate assembly to flex to fit
13 more than one size horse;
14 a cantle portion having an inverted U-shape located at the rear of the horse when
15 the saddle is installed thereupon; and
16 a flexible connecting portion joining said headplate assembly to said cantle portion.

1 Claims 38 and 39 (cancelled).